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ABSTRACT

One of the central problems in teaching dialectally divergent students to read is the teacher's own lack of awareness of the nature of dialects. Teachers with some linguistics background will be more sensitive to language variation, and will therefore be better able to recognize divergent dialects and to separate learning problems relating to dialect differences from those relating to intelligence, emotional adjustment, and other factors. The method best suited to both the linguistic and social realities of teaching dialectally diverse students to read is the "gentle guidance" approach, which separates the central concern of learning to read from the tangential goal of learning the standard dialect. In this method, students work in their own dialect, and the teacher resolves any confusion or questions as they arise, with straightforward and nonjudgmental linguistics-based explanations. This lets the whole class learn about dialect diversity as well as the reading process. A four-page bibliography is appended. (HOD)

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Dialect Diversity and the Teaching of Reading

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by

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, Seattle, Washington, April 25-27, 1985.

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Abstract

The extent to which the use of a nonstandard dialect interferes with a child's learning to read is a question which has been hotly debated for quite some time. However, few educators would deny that teachers at least need to understand the nature of such dialects and the potential difficulties which both students and teachers face in a classroom where nonstandard dialects are spoken. This paper presents a general overview of the nature of dialects and some of the central claims which have been made about dialect interference in reading, and critically reviews several methods which have been used to cope with nonstandard dialects in the reading classroom. My major conclusions are that the more a teacher knows about the nature of language, dialect variation, and their relationship to social forces, the better s/he will be able to recognize and handle dialect-related problems in his/her classes. The method best suited to both the linguistic and social realities of teaching dialectally diverse students to read, I believe, is the "gentle guidance" approach, which separates the central concern of learning to read from the tangential goal of learning the standard dialect.

Dialect Diversity and the Teaching of Reading

Learning to read, as we all know from first-hand experience, is a complex cognitive process, especially for students learning written English. Alan Cruttenden (1979), for one, has identified a number of different abilities which students need in order to conquer this process (pp.146-47). According to his analysis, even before the actual learning begins, students must be aware that their oral language can be represented in other forms, including one using written symbols which are to be analyzed in a systematic way. In addition, they must also have some general idea of the purpose of writing.

However, as students begin learning to read, more specific skills at four different levels of organization must be developed. First, on the letter level students must learn to distinguish between significantly different letter shapes and recognize nonsignificant differences (e.g., between printed and cursive forms of the same letter) for what they are. They must also learn to associate letters, both alone and in combination, with the specific phonemes they often (but not always) represent (for example, ch = /č/).

On the word level, students must come to recognize that letters may represent different phonemes depending on where they are located in the word (for instance, final e after a consonant is generally silent, while between two consonants it generally represents /ɛ/). Students must also be able to take the individual phonemes they identify from the letters and combine them into a recognizable word (which also involves the ability to recognize syllable divisions and stress patterns, since these both affect how letters and letter combinations will be pronounced); and they must learn to deal with exceptionally spelled words which cannot be sounded out, most likely by treating them as single units to be memorized as such.

The last two levels, sentence and discourse, require that students be able to take the words and sentences already identified and combine

them with neighboring words or sentences to derive the meaning of the larger units (sentences and larger discourse segments such as paragraphs), while taking advantage of context and grammatical relationships to increase comprehension.

According to Cruttenden, when problems arise in young children who are learning these skills as they learn to read English, such problems frequently involve "learning complex and variable grapheme-phoneme correspondences (particularly the vowels); analysing spoken words into phonemes; and blending separate phonemes into whole words" (p.150). In other words, readers may suffer in their abilities to work out all of the often-variable relationships between the letters they see on the page and the sounds they must learn to pick out from the spoken words associated with the letter groups.

Clearly, then, even normal, intelligent students working with a familiar spoken variety of their language (i.e., Standard American English--SAE) and with understandable, culturally relevant materials will face some areas of confusion and frustration in learning how to read English. It is not hard to imagine, then, the additional burdens placed on students who do not share the form of spoken language used by the teacher, the reading materials, and other students in the classroom--in other words, who may speak other dialects of English, particularly the varieties called nonstandard dialects, including Black English (BE), Appalachian English (AppE), and some forms of Amerindian English. Not only must they learn the complex relationships between written letters and spoken sound sequences within words, but they must do so for a form of spoken language which may be so different in pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary from their own dialect as to cause real problems in communication to arise. In effect, they face a double task: learning another dialect (usually without any formal instruction) while they are learning to read.

Such situations may be found in classrooms throughout the U.S., but they may be made easier for students speaking nonstandard dialects to bear by teachers who understand the nature of dialect diversity and the reading process, and who are prepared to help students over both

cognitive and sociological hurdles not faced by other students in the class. The purpose of this paper is to review some general background on American English dialects and their differences, to discuss in more detail the problems nonstandard-dialect speakers have in learning to read in school, and to consider what various researchers have suggested as ways for dealing with such students successfully in the reading classroom.

It appears that one of the central problems in teaching "dialectally divergent" (Goodman, 1972) students to read is the teacher's own lack of awareness of what dialects (and especially nonstandard dialects) actually involve. The common belief even today, after twenty years of research on the subject, seems to be that nonstandard dialects are failed attempts to conform to the standard (that is, the socially most prestigious or acceptable) dialect--hence the term "substandard," sometimes used in a very subjective way to label a speech variety as inferior to some other. From the linguist's viewpoint, however, there is no such thing as an inferior or substandard variety of a language: every dialect, by definition, is a systematic geographical (and occasionally social) variant of some language, having developed from perfectly natural historical changes in an older, more uniform stage of that language, and with its own consistently followed rules for pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary use. Every dialect is as valid a form of some language as any other dialect of that language, since all dialects are equally effective communication systems and display the same required properties of true language systems (rule-governedness, creativity, etc.).

However, while the historical basis of dialect development applies to the formation of all English dialects, certain social factors have complicated the situation for some of them. Certainly, it is easy to see how standard American dialects could have developed differently from British dialects, with an ocean separating the two language communities. But in the case of <u>nonstandard</u> American English dialects such as BE and AppE, dialects which arose through recognized historical

circumstances but which are now at least partially social class dialects, it becomes too easy to confuse social, racial and other differences between speakers, on the one hand, with linguistic differences between dialects, on the other. The consequence of this confusion is the transfer of subjective judgments about the speakers to the dialects spoken by them, with unfortunate results. This is especially likely to happen if the individuals holding these judgments operate under the further misapprehension (already mentioned) that the nonstandard dialect speakers are speaking an unsuccessful version of the standard dialect, rather than a successful version of their own.

One example of a nonstandard dialect feature which is commonly treated in this way is be deletion (see Wolfram and Christian, 1976, pp.40-41). In BE and (in very restricted contexts) AppE, it is possible to produce sentences with no verb where SAE would have some form of the verb be. In BE this is basically anywhere SAE could contract the subject and the form of be; in AppE this occurs only for are, and only after a pronoun, where contraction in SAE could occur. Thus, sentences such as "He busy," "They peelin' taters," and "That old man too slow" often occur in at least one of these dialects.

To individuals who assume that the speaker of such sentences is using the SAE verb system, this sounds lazy, sloppy or ignora[illegible]. But in fact, BE in particular does not use the SAE system, but a system grammatical in its own right. Many other languages of the world completely lack a copula (for example, Hebrew and Russian), but in BE it is not that there is no form of be, but that the presence or absence of be, besides being phonologically constrained, actually provides aspectual information: the presence of be indicates habitual or long-term actions or states, whereas the absence of be marks momentary or one-time actions or states (this is a simplified description; please see Labov, 1972, for more detailed discussions). A sentence such as "He in Pittsburgh," then, would mean that the subject was there for just a short while, whereas "He be in Pittsburgh" would indicate that the subject was living there on a long-term basis. Moreover, a sentence

such as "He my father" would, under normal circumstances, be nonsensical--one does not usually have a temporary father.

While these grammatical differences contribute greatly to prevailing social attitudes toward nonstandard dialects, there is still a great deal of debate about how many problems they would pose for children as they learn to read (see Baratz, 1973 and Edwards, 1979, among others, for more discussion of this issue, and compare Hartwell, 1980 and Morrow, 1985 for opposing views on the related issue of dialect interference in learning to write). It is perhaps clearer that pronunciation differences would be more likely to contribute to reading difficulties on a very basic level, both because these differences may be harder to recognize for what they are (i.e., systematic correspondences), and because our reading system depends so centrally on a reader's ability to recognize what sounds are represented by letters and groups of letters in order for him/her to figure out from this information what words are being represented.

Thus, if a SAE-speaking child is told that the spelling th represents the first sound in the word thin, and the middle sound in the word nothing, this works adequately because the child pronounces both of these sounds in the same way; there is, therefore, consistency in the relationship between the sound and how it is spelled (at least in this example). However, if a BE-speaking child is told the same thing, it will only lead to confusion, since for him/her the two sounds in these words are not the same, and may, in fact, both be different from the sound the teacher uses: that is, in many varieties of BE, the first sound in thin will be /t/, while the middle sound in nothing will be /f/--neither one the /θ/ of the teacher.

Thus, in practice, unless the teacher knows enough about linguistics, or about the dialect used by his/her students, to point out how English spelling can be used to represent spoken nonstandard dialect forms, the students will be left to figure out on their own a bewildering maze of relationships--between letters and sounds in the teacher's dialect, between the teacher's pronunciation of words and the students' own pronunciation, and finally, between their pronunciation of words

and the spellings of those words. Since English spelling is not overly phonetic to begin with, perhaps these students' task of recognizing unphonetic spellings for words is not that much different from the standard-dialect speaker's task. However, given that they must work out the correspondences through the mediation of a dialect not their own, one whose differences from the readers' own dialect may not be understood and are rarely pointed out explicitly by the teacher, learning to read for the nonstandard-dialect speaker clearly involves extra cognitive steps which standard-dialect speakers do not go through, steps requiring extra time and effort that might better be applied to the central learning task itself.

Nor is this the only problem which confronts nonstandard-dialect speakers. As mentioned earlier, the social side of the dialect situation also affects how quickly and well these students learn to read. It is well known that the attitudes conveyed by a teacher toward his/her students can have a profound effect on their own attitudes toward learning, and, consequently, on how well they learn. If a teacher considers a student socially, intellectually, or linguistically inferior to others in the class, that student will most certainly recognize it, and his/her performance in class will be negatively affected by it.

Since many language-arts teachers do believe that nonstandard dialects are socially and even linguistically inferior, the speakers of those dialects cannot help but feel that they are at a disadvantage in the classroom, often without really understanding the cause. This feeling will have undesirable consequences quite separate from the frustration and demoralization caused by having to work harder than one's neighbors at learning to read. It is really no surprise that nonstandard-dialect speakers fall behind the others in learning all sorts of classroom skills: they may be socially stigmatized at the start because of their ethnic background and their dialect, may later be treated as slow learners because of their difficulties in learning skills being taught to them in a strange dialect (as well as because of stereotyped expectations), and so may end up reinforcing their

teacher's opinion of them for precisely the wrong reasons--because of the effects of negative reinforcement and extra cognitive burdens, rather than an inherent lack of ability.

These social factors have yet another effect, too: besides fostering discouragement and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure, teachers' negative dialect attitudes can also very easily breed active resentment and lack of cooperation in students, with obvious implications for learning. If a student feels him/herself labeled as inferior, but sees no good reason for it, then that student is likely to reject that attitude, and the teacher and class material along with it. This at least partially explains the high drop-out rates among nonstandard-dialect-speaking students in schools, as well as the poor performances of some students who are capable of doing better if they so chose.

Given all of these considerations, what is a teacher of reading with nonstandard-dialect-speaking students in his/her class to do? This has been much debated, and no completely felicitous answer has yet been found, but there is some practical advice that can be offered.

The first thing I would recommend for any teacher is learning more about the nature of language, dialects, the relationship between linguistic and social factors, and (for the reading teacher specifically) about the reading process itself. Even if this background does not give a teacher ideas about how to teach reading to nonstandard-dialect speakers, it should at the very least lead to some changes in his/her attitudes toward these dialects--hopefully, in the direction of greater tolerance and objectivity. This can only help students, who are (as we all know) very sensitive to classroom climate even at a young age. If teachers accept their students for what they are and focus on their strengths as learners, the students will naturally become confident and secure in their learning, as well as receptive to new ideas.

Moreover, teachers with some linguistics background will be more sensitive to language variation, and will therefore be better able to recognize divergent dialects and to separate learning problems relating to dialect differences from those relating to factors of intelligence,

emotional adjustment, and so on. Obviously, one would have to approach each sort of factor--and indeed, each specific dialect--in a different manner, and being able to distinguish them is a necessary first step. Beyond this, though, linguistics will enable a teacher to analyze the dialects used in the classroom (or to understand relevant published descriptions) and so be prepared to explain systematically and objectively specific feature differences that might cause confusion to the students (or to the teacher him/herself). As Wolfram and Christian (1976) say, "an important consideration in all cases [of dialect diversity] is the need for an understanding of the features of the dialect before any special measure can be undertaken" (p.153).

Four different "special measures" for handling nonstandard-dialect speakers in the reading classroom have been discussed in the literature, each with its own rationale and set of arguments pro and con. Wolfram and Christian (1976) give a particularly thoughtful summary of these approaches, and I will further summarize their discussion here (Wolfram, 1970 gives a more detailed overview). Some of the obvious factors to consider in evaluating these plans are their financial feasibility (since some might incur costs in teacher training or preparation of special materials), their effect on integration and the social climate in the classroom, and of course their effectiveness in overcoming or avoiding dialect-related problems students might otherwise encounter in learning to read.

To start with, probably the most hotly debated approach involves training the nonstandard-dialect speakers to use SAE before they even begin reading instruction, so that by the time the students start their normal curriculum, they will be comfortable with the standard dialect and will not be at a disadvantage compared to the standard-speaking students. Some proponents of this view favor it because they see it (quite unrealistically, given social forces) as a means of <u>eradicating</u> the "deficient" nonstandard dialect without simply leaving students to sink or swim on their own (as used to be done)--everyone in this case would be forced to swim (that is, to learn the new dialect). Other proponents of this approach at least recognize the linguistic validity

of nonstandard dialects, and so espouse bidialectalism for these students, where the standard dialect becomes the one used in their education (again, to ease the learning process) and in certain social situations, while their native nonstandard dialect will still be used in other appropriate social situations (e.g., with family and friends).

Whichever rationale one uses to justify this plan, there are any number of arguments against its feasiblity. First, the rationale promoting "dialecticide" is morally and linguistically objectionable, since every dialect is legitimate, and accusations of deficiency stem from the accuser's ignorance and social prejudices, rather than a real understanding of dialect diversity. Many people do, however, recognize the usefulness of bidialectalism (in spite of the debate over the political role of the standard dialect; see Sledd, 1983; Farrell, 1984; Sledd, 1984), and do agree that if all students spoke the same dialect, the one used by teacher and reading materials, the learning situation would be more equitable. Moreover, social reality in this country, whatever its injustices, does penalize those who cannot use SAE in the appropriate situations, so the practicality of learning it at some point cannot really be denied. Nevertheless, it is not at all agreed upon that teaching the standard dialect as an extra part of the curriculum for nonstandard-dialect speakers is the way to achieve either bidialectalism or equitable learning of normal school skills.

The main argument against this approach is that it delays the point at which these students would enter the mainstream learning process--it would be de facto segregation initially, with later integration resulting in the novice standard-dialect speakers working at a lower level than their native standard-speaking peers, at least to start with. The extra teaching time would also involve extra costs, putting a strain on already-pinched school budgets. Moreover, there is some doubt that this sort of instruction would even be successful in getting students to use the standard, not so much for pedogogical reasons as for the social ones mentioned before--students may resent being put through the process, or may not see its usefulness and so not put much effort into learning SAE. Given the uncertainty of success for this approach, then, and given its moral and social drawbacks, most reading instructors will want to turn to one of the other three methods.

The approach falling at the opposite extreme from changing the student is to change instead the materials used in school by these students, at least those used to teach reading. That is, speakers of nonstandard dialects would learn to read using books and other materials written in their dialect, so that associating spelling and pronunciation would be more straightforward than if materials in a different dialect were used, and therefore this ability would be easier to acquire. Furthermore, this method would have an overall positive effect on the students' learning, since the reaffirmation of their dialect's validity will foster and reinforce positive attitudes about other aspects of their identity and worth, which in turn will increase motivation and cooperation in other learning activities.

Obviously, many proponents of the first approach would abhor this one, since it both perpetuates and legitimizes nonstandard dialects. This approach also requires a certain amount of segregation and might be felt by some parents to be yet another mark of social inferiority (besides being a barrier to their children's "getting ahead"). Moreover, the anecdotal evidence and limited experimentation which has been done to test how well dialect readers actually do improve reading performance have offered only mild, though definite, encouragement for using this method. To my knowledge, there has been no widespread study performed using large numbers of students, and the small studies which have been done have been subject to criticism of various sorts, so that strong evidence is still lacking that dialect readers as a rule function better than SAE materials at keeping nonstandard-dialect speakers level with their standard-dialect-speaking peers in learning to read (see Baratz, 1973 for more details).

However, even if the merits of this method could be agreed upon, there are more practical problems with its implementation. Since most people (including many parents in nonstandard-dialect-speaking communities) do agree on the social benefits of speaking the standard dialect, the students who learn to read in a nonstandard dialect would still have to learn the standard at some time, most probably by using sets of transitional reading materials which introduce more and more

features of the standard as they replace nonstandard features (in other words, some materials would actually be hybridizations of the two dialects). Not only would devising such materials be complicated, time-consuming and costly, but they might also lead to a certain amount of confusion if their hybrid nature is not explained clearly. The question of the age (or level of reading ability) at which the students would make the transition is also open to debate.

Yet another logistical and financial complication is that each nonstandard dialect would have to have its own set of materials, as using such readers with inappropriate student populations would have the same sorts of difficulties as using SAE materials--that is, dialect interference. Finally, there is the area of teacher training to consider: teachers would have to be able to use the nonstandard dialect in the classroom and work with the reading materials, and this would require additional work and expense in developing training and/or review programs.

A more socially acceptable approach to handling reading materials involves developing so-called "dialect-fair" or "dialect-free" readers (Wolfram and Christian, 1976, p.155)--that is, materials that would be restricted in form to those syntactic, vocabulary (and, I assume, pronunciation) features which occur in both the standard and nonstandard dialects; features that have different forms in the two dialects would be avoided. The hope is that all students would be able to use these materials with equal success, since none of them would encounter unfamiliar or confusing language forms as they learn to read. The added attraction to this approach is that neither the standard-dialect supporters nor the nonstandrad-dialect supporters need be offended, since the materials would include standard features, would avoid stigmatized ones, but would also <u>not</u> put the nonstandard-dialect speakers at a social or cognitive disadvantage.

Again, this is appealing in theory, but encounters considerable problems in practice. The main difficulty is putting together materials which would be both free of marked dialect features <u>and</u> written in a natural and intelligible manner. Some compromises could be made as

to which features--and how many of them--to avoid, but regardless of whether totally new materials are written or old ones are modified (a process with difficulties of its own), this method will still be complicated and costly. It also merely postpones the need to deal with the standard dialect in the classroom, though the transition would probably be smoother than that achieved through the use of dialect readers.

Given all the drawbacks to the first three approaches, only the fourth one, what I call the "gentle guidance" approach, appears feasible. In this method (discussed by Weaver, 1985 as well as by Wolfram and Christian, 1976), each student (and teacher) works in his/her own dialect, and the teacher takes care of confusions and questions as they arise, through straightforward and nonjudgmental linguistics-based explanations, thereby letting the whole class learn more about dialect diversity as well as the reading process. There has been considerable discussion of the stultifying effects which constant correction of students' speech can have on class participation, creativity and attitudes toward the classroom (see Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, 1972, for one), so that many teachers probably already can see the wisdom of letting students express themselves using their own dialects during class discussions. However, the idea can be extended even to reading aloud, so that students would be able to read in their own dialects, in effect making sense of the text by converting it to language forms they are familiar with. This may be the way good readers approach the task, in any case (see Paivio and Begg, 1981, and Eberwein, 1982, for discussion of the reading process and of the minimal effects of dialect-related reading miscues on comprehension, respectively)--that is, they read for meaning rather than for pronunciation and specific language forms. If this is true, then encouraging students to ignore dialect differences unless they actively interfere with comprehension, and accepting rather than correcting reading miscues which reflect dialect differences and not lack of understanding, may well be the easiest course for all concerned.

This method would require the teacher to be familiar with the dialects used in his/her class, so that s/he could distinguish real reading mistakes from dialect differences (Weaver, 1985). S/he would also want this familiarity in order to explain any features of the text which might confuse the reader, clarifying the trouble spots in terms of the features' equivalents in the student's own dialect. This approach has the advantage of being able to work in a mixed-dialect classroom, since standard-dialect-speaking students and nonstandard-dialect speakers would be learning to read together, at the same rate, and in addition would benefit through developing an understanding of the various dialects used by all the students.

Furthermore, if it is true that structural interference between dialects is not the major cause of reading problems in nonstandard-dialect-speaking students (which is not to say that no problems arise from this source), then other factors in the classroom situation must be contributing to such problems, the most likely candidates being social factors relating to attitudes toward the dialects and toward the speakers. In other words, we return to our earlier concern about social interaction in the classroom being influenced by dialect differences as well as social/ethnic/racial differences. If a teacher wants to encourage linguistic minorities to achieve in the classroom, s/he must make them feel a part of the class, and one way to do this is through treating all dialects as legitimate alternatives to use in the classroom for all learning activities, including reading.

This is not to say that teachers should fail to make clear to students which dialect is the socially most prestigious one, but this should be done in an objective way, with no coercion involved, so students feel free to make their own choices (as long as they know the consequences). If they care enough (and if their parents and peers are supportive), they will learn a great deal of SAE through observation, and can be helped, as needed, with any unclear features. They can also be taught which social situations are most appropriate for speaking the standard through the use of sociodrama, where students act out scenes set in various social situations, using their own ideas of effective speech or writing to achieve specific goals such as impressing a job interviewer at a large business (see Chaika, 1982, pp.185-86, for more discussion). But the primary goal of the reading teacher, certainly,

should be to teach students to read, and this is a totally separate skill from the ability to speak the standard dialect.

Of course, there are potential drawbacks to the gentle guidance approach, as there are with the others, the main one hinging on the degree to which dialect interference actually does hinder the process of learning to read. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the question is by no means resolved. However, if it is true that dialect differences, especially in pronunciation, do cause non-negligible problems, then the gentle guidance approach will probably not be enough to help the students concerned. There is also the probability of meaning misinterpretations, both on the part of the students as they read the text and on the part of the teacher as s/he evaluates the student's ability to read and understand; only a thorough knowledge of both dialects will minimize confusion here.

Nevertheless, this approach is a good compromise, given the practical limitations of school budgets and the educational goals of most schools, and it is certainly better than traditional lines of attack ("attack" to be taken literally) or truly laissez-faire "sink or swim" approaches. It should be fairly inexpensive, requiring no special materials (unless the teacher chooses to make up some culturally relevant ones) and a manageable amount of linguistic training for the teachers--training which is becoming part of more and more English education programs in any case. It should not offend the supporters of standard dialect study, since students will have every opportunity to learn the standard in a positive atmosphere, and in fact can be encouraged to do so as strongly as school officials, parents and/or teachers feel is needed (see the Ann Arbor Decision, Joiner, 1979, for a case where teaching the standard dialect was considered part of the school's responsibility). It should also be acceptable to supporters of non-standard dialect legitimacy because of its tolerant view on dialect diversity. But most importantly, it should provide some help to non-standard-dialect speakers, in the direct form of explanations for linguistic difficulties they might run into in reading, and in the indirect

form of a more open, tolerant and egalitarian classroom atmosphere.

To conclude this discussion, I would like to note the obvious: dialect diversity is only one aspect of cultural diversity encountered in the classroom. This means that the sources of other reading or learning problems experienced by linguistic and cultural minorities are certain to go beyond dialect interference to other kinds of social conflicts. Weaver (1985) recommends that we "recognize that our students' cultural experiences, beliefs, and values will affect what they comprehend in reading, and adjust our reading instruction and our interpretation of test results accordingly" (p.5), but we also have to recognize that such awareness of cultural differences should permeate the entire classroom experience.

Some of the factors which a teacher would want to consider in interacting with his/her students, in developing class materials, and in evaluating student performance and learning ability are cultural differences in nonverbal communication (see Byers and Byers, 1972, and Philips, 1976), in learning styles (Cazden and John, 1968; John, 1972; Gardner, 1983), in community valuation of literacy (Goody, 1968; Philips, 1975), and in demonstration of newly acquired knowledge and other aspects of classroom behavior (Dumont, 1972; Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, 1972; Philips, 1976). Being aware of such differences and finding ways to accomodate them (for example, by developing culturally relevant materials, by learning to interpret a student's behavior by the standards of his/her own culture, etc.) can make the difference between an academically unsuccessful student who feels confused and alienated, and a successful, motivated student who truly enjoys learning.

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